

Sheryl R. Wilson

The Honorable Donetta W. Ambrose
United States District Court
Western District of Pennsylvania
Joseph F. Weis, Jr.
U.S. Courthouse
700 Grant Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

June 13, 2019

Dear Judge Ambrose,

I am writing this letter in support of victims/survivors having contact with defense teams, most especially in crimes of severe violence and capital cases. I have worked in the field of restorative justice for nearly 20 years and over a decade as a Defense-Victim Outreach (DVO) liaison in capital cases around the country on the federal and state level. For the past two years, I have served as the Board President of the National Association of Community and Restorative Justice (an organization serving Restorative Justice professionals) and I currently work as the Executive Director of the Kansas Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution in North Newton, KS.

In my encounters with victims/survivors of violent crime, I have learned how important it is to provide as many choices as possible in a matter that they did not initiate – meaning that they should be allowed access to any information that is legally obtainable concerning the loss of their loved ones. Having the choice to meet with defense team members is one of the ways that many victims/survivors get information and find answers to questions that only a defendant may know.

One of the reasons why I work as a DVO liaison is because, at its core, it is restorative justice work. Restorative Justice is a way of looking at how to repair the harm, in whatever ways might be possible, that crime or wrongdoing creates. If a victim/survivor wants to make meaning of harm by connecting with a defense team and, in some cases, with a defendant, discouraging them from such action causes more harm.

In an effort to lessen the harm and burden that victims/survivors bear, it is essential that they be afforded access to both the prosecution and the defense teams. Both sides have the potential to offer information and provide an avenue for healing and restoration in the face of tragedy. It is incumbent upon our justice system to encourage and not impede victims/survivors as they make their way forward.

Thank you for your time and attention in this matter.

Sincerely,



Sheryl R. Wilson,
Restorative Justice Practitioner and DVO Liaison